

# Tribute to my Indian friends

July 26, 2016 robesonian Columns, Opinion 1



I recently had the privilege of visiting with my friends, the Indians of Robeson County. While there, both Tuscarora and the Lumbee treated me with kindness and respect and for this I say thank you my brothers and sisters. I shall always see your smiles and hear your voices where ever I may be.

I would like to thank Chief Leon Locklear of the Tuscarora for the tremendous welcome and powwow and I thank Lumbee

Chairman Harvey Godwin for the hospitality he shared with me. I met many of his fine staff and thank them all for their assistance, especially Mr. James Locklear. I believe Harvey to be a fine leader who is capable of leading the Lumbee people if they choose to help him. Remember my friends, great leaders require the trust and support of their people to succeed.

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To Ashton Locklear, I wish you well and please know as you travel to Brazil that you are not going on your journey alone, for you carry the good intentions of your people with you. We ask no more than you do your best. If you do that my Ashton, you will have succeeded. Please know that while you represent the United States of America, you also represent every Native American in North America. Brazil shall also be proud of your heritage. Travel light and may The Great Spirit watch over you my young friend.

To “Big Daddy” Strickland and his lovely daughters, I shall never forget the many meals your hands prepared for me and my people during our visit in Robeson County in 1972. Both the food and hospitality were delicious.

In my memories, I shall always carry the snapshot of the many motorcycle riders, both the Redrum M.C. riders as well as the independent souls upon the steel horses, escorting The Longest Walk 5 marchers into your homeland. You are my brothers and sisters and know how that in spirit I ride with you.

A special thanks to my friend, Jojo Brooks Shifflett, for giving me her book, “A Lumbee Gershom.” I found within its pages not just words but memories. Memories of forgotten days and traditions of the Indians of Robeson County. I encourage every educator of Indians in Robeson and surrounding counties to read it and consider its value as a tool in teaching younger generations their history. Some of her words reminded me of my days as an American Indian Movement warrior fighting to the secure the civil rRights of the Indians in Robeson County back in the 1970s.

Please know this warrior did not fight that battle alone. I marched sided by side with your forgotten leaders of the past. Such men as Keever Locklear, Henry Brooks, Ben Chavis, Lawrence Maynor. Howard Brooks and Carnell Locklear fought that battle with me.

They stood beside me not only in Robeson County but in Washington, D.C.. They were and are your warriors and must not be forgotten. There were not only men marching in the front lines but we cannot forget the greatness of the women who both marched and were with us in the trenches. Their actions earned them a place of respect within the heart of AIM. They shall be remembered forever. It is my hope these people secured a proper place of respect in your hearts as well.

Finally, please allow me to clarify any negative ideas that may have been said about Carnell Locklear and Keever Locklear and their part in the Trail of Broken treaties and alleged financial gain. During the occupation of the BIA Building in 1972, The Trail of Broken Treaties Team consisted of three leaders of caravans — Russ Means represented Seattle and had 22 cars in his caravan, I had 15 cars in my San Francisco caravan and Bill Sargeant represented Los Angeles and had 18 cars in his caravan.

I kept receipts of all expenses and it was fairly easy to determine the refunds due to each leader for gas and food expenses. Money (\$66,000) was given to the National Congress of the American Indians to distribute to each respective leader to assist them in getting their caravans back home.

Please know the caravans from Robeson, North Carolina, under the leadership of Carnell Locklear and Keever Locklear, received no money whatsoever or any other form of financial gain as a result of participating in the Trail of Broken Treaties. I asked Carnell Locklear and Keever Locklear how much money they would need to cover their expenses back home. Carnell said, “We didn’t come for money Dennis, we came to support the Trails of Broken Treaties. We will pay for the trip ourselves.”

legislation

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Again, I thank the Indians of Robeson County for hosting me and the walkers of The longest Walk 5 and I thank my ole' warrior and friend, Carnell, for the memories.

*Dennis Banks is an American Indian teacher, lecturer, activist and author who is well-known for his work with the American Indian Movement.*








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EDITOR'S PICKS



Maxton man faces charges related to violation of 'nuisance' order

October 27, 2020  
LUMBERTON — A Maxton man was arrested Monday for failure to appear in Robeson County Superior Court and allegedly violating a judicial order to stay away from a location in Maxton that has been identified as a “nuisance” and a site of various criminal activities.

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...stiling running from his central role in the murder of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash in 1975; no one could have touched a hair on her head without the knowledge and approval of the man who was having an affair with her and who blamed her for the Marlon Brando motor home bust. Shameful past, present-day coward.

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## The election may not be over election night

October 27, 2020

Voters and media alike, beware: We may not know the winners next Tuesday night. We may not know until all eligible absentee ballots are counted days later.

[...]

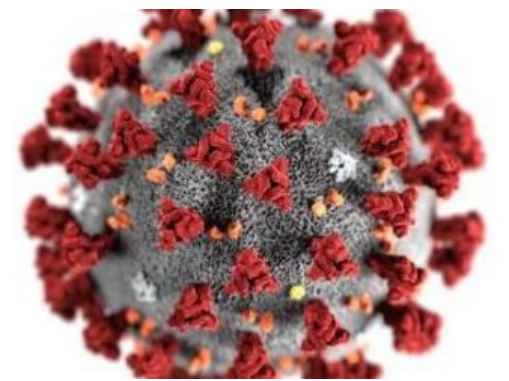


## UNCP's leader doesn't deserve grief for being at Trump rally

October 27, 2020

Regardless of your political beliefs or your stance on federal recognition of the Lumbee Tribe, you have to tip your hat to a man who had to know he was walking into a no-win situation, opening himself up to the barbs of anger and criticism. But walk in he did.

[...]







## Democrats may fall just short



October 26, 2020

RALEIGH — Of all the important electoral contests on North Carolina’s ballot, our General Assembly races will be among the most consequential.

The state legislature funds and sets policy for major institutions — from schools and colleges to roads and hospitals — with which many North Carolinians interact on a daily basis. While the governor and other statewide-elected executives enjoy significant authority, North Carolina remains a state where the legislative branch is, by constitutional design, the most powerful.

Out of the 170 legislative seats, a couple dozen key matchups will determine partisan control of the North Carolina House and Senate, which currently have 65-55 and 29-21 Republican majorities, respectively.

In the past, I’d have described that relatively small set of competitive races as at least in part an artifact of partisan gerrymandering. That’s no longer the main story, however. After several rounds of litigation, the state’s legislative (and congressional) districts have been redrawn to reduce substantially the partisan skews of previous maps.

## Robeson County’s COVID-19 death toll now at 101

October 27, 2020  
LUMBERTON — Robeson County surpassed the grim milestone of 100 deaths related to COVID-19 when three were reported Tuesday by the Robeson County Health Department.

[...]  
•



## Trump support for Lumbee recognition a big part of talk about rally

October 27, 2020  
LUMBERTON — Talk of President Donald Trump’s rally Saturday at the county fairgrounds still was linked to his support of federal recognition for the Lumbee Tribe days after he left.

[...]  
•

## Crime report

October 27, 2020  
The following thefts were reported Monday and Tuesday to the Robeson County Sheriff’s Office:

[...]  
•



Now, the primary explanation for the existence of uncompetitive legislative districts is what is often called the Big Sort. Democratic-leaning voters have chosen to live disproportionately in North Carolina’s largest urban areas. Republican-leaning voters live disproportionately in rural areas and outer suburbs. The places that fit neither mold — suburban communities close to big cities, smaller cities and towns, and certain rural areas with high populations of minorities and non-native retirees — tend to be where you find the competitive seats.

Cumberland County, for example, contains an urban core, suburbs and smaller towns, and a highly diverse population along multiple dimensions. Not surprisingly, it boasts three competitive legislative races: House 43, House 45, and Senate 19, a rematch between incumbent Democratic Sen. Kirk deViere and the senator he supplanted two years ago, Republican Wesley Meredith.

Forsyth County is another key battleground. In House 74, Republican Jeff Zenger, a former member of the Lewisville Town Council, is trying to defend a previously GOP-held seat from Democrat Dan Besse, a Winston-Salem councilman. In Senate 31, Republican incumbent Joyce Kraviec faces a spirited challenge from Democrat Terri LeGrande, an administrator at Wake Forest University.

From the mountains to the coast, you’ll find other highly contested races with experienced, well-financed candidates fighting out it for the votes — and, honestly, just the attention spans — of North Carolinians who have a lot of other things on their minds right now.

My crystal ball has a big crack in it from the 2016 cycle, I must admit. Still, as I gaze into its somewhat-disfigured form, I see Democratic gains this year but not necessarily a takeover of either chamber. In the House, a rural seat currently held by Democrat Scott Brewer seems likely to fall to Republican Ben Moss, a Richmond County commissioner. That means the Democrats need a net pickup of seven seats elsewhere, a tall order.

On the Senate side, Democrats seem destined to pick up two newly redrawn seats centered in Wake (Senate 18) and Mecklenburg (Senate 39). But the next three seats they need to reach a 26-24 majority will be harder gets, in part because Republicans have a reasonable shot of retaking a couple of seats they lost in 2018.

Whatever happens, North Carolina’s legislative contests will be part of an important but underreported national story of partisan battles over control of state governments going into 2021 — a pivotal year when COVID-era budgets will be set, states will struggle to emerge from the COVID recession, lawmakers will fashion post-COVID changes in education and health-care policy, and new sets of legislative and congressional districts will be drawn around the nation, usually (but not always) by state legislators.

In addition to North Carolina’s two chambers, the legislatures most likely to flip from one party to the other are, for the most part, in other battleground states: Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania.

As always, I would urge North Carolinians to look at more than just the marquee races. Do your homework. Complete your ballots. Legislative and other down-ballot races deserve your attention.

## The shameful sacrifice of our children

## Pembroke Planning Board schedules special meeting for Thursday

October 27, 2020  
PEMBROKE — The Planning Board here has scheduled a special meeting for 5 p.m. Thursday.

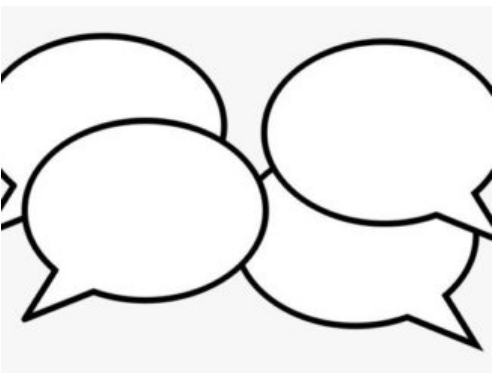
[...]



## Lumberton man faces charges after being arrested in St. Pauls

October 26, 2020  
ST. PAULS — A 20-year-old Lumberton man faces several charges after being arrested in connection to an Oct. 19 purse-snatching incident.

[...]



## Quotes of the week

October 26, 2020  
“I want Miss Tammy to send a letter to the beaver guy.”

[...]





October 23, 2020

When I was invited by The Robesonian to continue writing once a week, I had a choice — pen a column that gave me a lot of freedom, or an editorial that presumably would tackle issues of local import, which I had done for about 24 years.

I chose the column for several reasons, including that I saw it as an opportunity to just have fun. As for an editorial, been there, done that, and I figured the newspaper and its readers might benefit from a different perspective.

Today I put at least one tire back into my old lane, so be warned. I know that many will disagree with what I have to say, which is fine, so here goes.

As we continue to try to defeat this COVID-19 thing and I see empty football stadiums across the country, I ask myself: Could there be a safer place from COVID-19 than in an open-air stadium while wearing a mask?

I am not where I prefer to be on this Saturday — inside Kenan Stadium watching North Carolina play N.C. State — because of Gov. Roy Cooper's edict that the stadium could only be filled to 7% capacity — a decision that is not based on science, so must be based on whim.

I know that eyes just rolled, and some muttered, "People are dying and poor Donnie doesn't get to go see a football game." I will survive, but I can assure you there are many people in Chapel Hill and surrounding communities who are struggling to survive, at least financially, when 50,000 people don't visit for seven football Saturdays in the fall. These people whose lives are being destroyed by our nation's paralysis are all around us.

As what remains of my hair got longer and unruly, the problem was never my inability to get a haircut, it was that the person who cut my hair wasn't getting paid 20 bucks to do so. So many people trying to eke out a living have been denied a voice during this pandemic, people who are struggling to pay bills, but also with their mental health as substance abuse, domestic abuse and suicides trend upward.

No one has had less voice than our children, and we are doing decades of damage to their generation. No person who is informed and minimally conscious believes virtual learning



## Democrats may fall just short

October 26, 2020

RALEIGH — Of all the important electoral contests on North Carolina's ballot, our General Assembly races will be among the most consequential.

[...]



## Deadline to request absentee ballot is 5 p.m. Tuesday

October 26, 2020

RALEIGH — The deadline to request an absentee ballot for use during the 2020 general election is 5 p.m. Tuesday.

[...]



## Robeson County Bears building as first season concludes

will work in Robeson County, yet that is what we continue to do. Consider the insanity of that.

I talk frequently with educators, administrators and teachers, as well as students, and they speak with a single voice when asked how online learning is going in this county. Not well, they say, and typically there is a shake of the head. One educator told me that a full third of her students have not logged on for virtual learning since school “resumed.”

These are students who have already lost valuable classroom time to hurricanes Matthew and Florence, and now they are just falling further behind academically.

The challenges locally to online learning are tall and sturdy, including a lack of infrastructure as well as many single-parent homes where there simply isn't an adult available to make sure the child is fastened in front of a computer.

I have said for months to send the children to school, which solves the child care problem as well as gets them fed, and allow the teachers to teach remotely, from home if they wish, or at the school, sequestered away from the students. Parents could opt to keep their children at home if they wished.

Such an approach would restore a sense of normalcy and routine for children starved for both. Of course, I have been told by those without a better idea why my plan was foolish, including that children would be unruly in the classrooms.

Volunteers, perhaps parents, could wear masks, social distance, and act as classroom monitors, making sure the children behaved. I bet you could find an impressive bunch of volunteers for the assignment. Regardless, unruly is better than absent.

Increasingly studies are showing that schools that are open for students to attend are not super-spreaders. COVID-19 has given us a big break, and that is — with some exceptions, of course — it targets the elderly, many of whom suffer co-morbidities. But for some reason public policy has given that little weight, refusing to add to the calculus the collateral damage.

We also must factor in where these children are for those seven or eight hours that they are not in school. If you think they are at home, ducking COVID-19, you are wrong. They are out and about, putting themselves and others at risk. What sports, both professionally and collegiately, has informed us, is that controlled environments do work in the fight against this disease.

I know sending children back to school would require ingenuity and courage, which are hard to find these days. Yet this is a nation that sent its young people to Normandy, knowing that thousands would die on its beaches as we changed the course of history away from tyranny and toward liberty. Now, confronted with a disease that kills a tiny fraction and has become less lethal, we continue to cower.

Sacrifice is what is called for, and that should fall on the adults, not the children. What we continue to see is the adults sacrificing the children. It's shameful, and history will not be kind.

October 26, 2020

FAYETTEVILLE — The Robeson County Bears semi-professional football team finished its first season with a close loss to the Rockingham County Grizzlies on Saturday, one in which the fate of the game — and likely their Central Carolina Football League playoff chances — was sealed with a missed opportunity inside the 10-yard line in the game's final seconds.

[...]

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## COVID, classrooms and corporations: The Cooper-Forest campaign





October 22, 2020

COVID-19 dominates North Carolina's governor's race, and it likely will determine the outcome. But there's another big difference between the two candidates. It gets less attention, but matters more for the future.

It's an issue that North Carolina has debated for more than 60 years: What is the best way to build a better future — cut taxes or invest in public education?

As he runs for a second four-year term, Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper frames the choice as "classrooms or corporations." He says the Republican-majority legislature has passed tax cuts for big corporations and wealthy individuals at the expense of public education.

Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Forest supports the legislature's tax cuts. Like Republicans in the legislature, he supports vouchers and tax credits for parents who send their children to private schools.

This debate goes back to the 1950s. That's when North Carolina emerged as an economic powerhouse, attracting industries from across the country and around the world.

Gov. Luther Hodges (1954-1961), a retired textile executive, made his mark as an industry hunter. The state offered companies lower taxes as an inducement for locating factories here. Low taxes — along with less regulation, low wages and low unionization — became North Carolina's calling card in corporate boardrooms.

But a competing philosophy emerged, championed by Gov. Terry Sanford (1961-1965), the patron saint of North Carolina's post-World War II progressives.

Sanford said North Carolina should focus on better education as the best foundation for the future. As governor, he prevailed on a reluctant legislature to levy a sales tax on food to pay for an ambitious education program.

Jonathan Yardley wrote of Sanford in The Washington Post in 1985:

"Teacher salaries went up 22 percent, a statewide system of community colleges was established, the North Carolina School of the Arts was created; the foundation was laid by

Sanford for the more sophisticated and expensive educational improvements that may prove to be the chief legacy of the state's most recent ex-governor, James B. Hunt Jr."

Gov. Cooper, like Gov. Hunt (1977-1985 and 1993-2001) subscribes to the Sanford philosophy. So did Democratic Gov. Mike Easley (2001-2009), who, like Sanford, passed a tax increase to fund education improvements.

For decades, there was bipartisan support for what was called "North Carolina's civic religion" of investing in public schools to promote economic development. Republican Gov. Jim Holshouser (1973-1977) supported statewide kindergartens and big pay raises for teachers. Republican Gov. Jim Martin (1985-1993) pushed for Reagan-like tax cuts in his first term but also supported the Basic Education Plan to boost public schools.

Because of a booming economy — and rising tax revenues — North Carolina could both cut taxes and spend more money on schools. When Republicans took the House in 1994, they and Gov. Hunt agreed to pass big tax cuts. Then, in 1997, key Republicans supported Hunt's billion-dollar-plus plans to raise teacher pay to the national average and expand the Smart Start early childhood program.

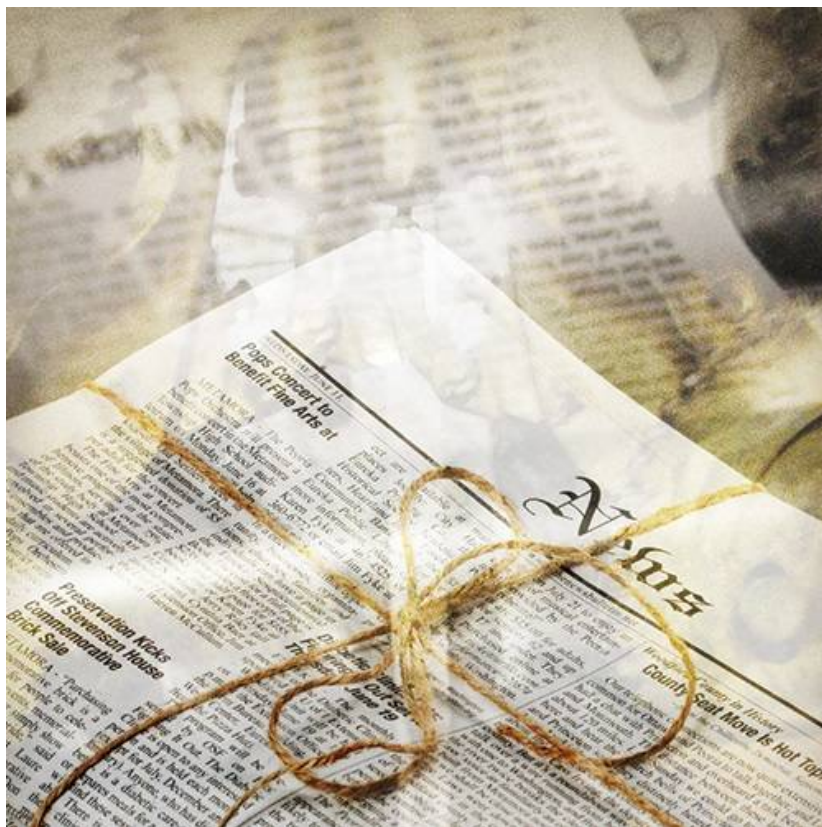
The bipartisan consensus shattered after Republicans took both houses of the legislature in 2010. They focused on passing billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts, and education advocates say public schools have suffered.

The legislature also has directed money to private schools. That's another echo of the 1950s, when private schools emerged as an alternative to integrated public schools.

This election offers North Carolinians the clearest choice between these dueling philosophies since Sanford ran for governor in 1960. Today's headlines focus on COVID, health care, face masks and how fast to reopen schools and businesses in the pandemic. But the future may ride on the choice between classrooms and corporations.

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## North Carolina leads in jobs lost



October 21, 2020



RALEIGH — There are about 300,000 fewer jobs in North Carolina today than there were in February, before the start of the COVID-19 recession. That's a 7.5% drop in total employment — the biggest decline in the southern United States.

Our labor market also compares poorly on other measures. Our September unemployment rate of 7.3% is higher than the regional average. Our neighboring states of South Carolina (5.1%), Virginia (6.2%), Tennessee (6.3%), and Georgia (6.4%) all have lower jobless rates.

Nor is this just a statistical artifact driven by workers giving up and dropping out of the labor force. If you compare the ratio of people employed to the total working-age population, all four neighboring states still rank higher than North Carolina.

On the other hand, Georgia and South Carolina rank significantly higher in COVID death rates — 72 and 71 per 100,000 residents, respectively, versus North Carolina's 37, according to the latest counts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Virginia (40) and Tennessee (42) have modestly higher death rates, as well.

For the most part, all sides of the COVID debate agree that Gov. Roy Cooper's regulations have been among the strictest in the region. Disagreements arise about whether or not the benefits of Cooper's approach have outweighed the costs — counted not just in jobs, incomes, and businesses lost but in adverse medical, educational, and social consequences — as well as what North Carolina should do from this point forward to battle COVID in the most cost-effective manner.

I have opinions about these questions, naturally. I bet you do, too. But can we first agree that some questions can't be answered authoritatively right now, given our necessarily limited information?

For example, while it's possible Cooper's tighter regulations on bars, restaurants, public venues, and educational settings have reduced viral transmission enough to explain some of the difference in COVID death rates, there are clearly other variables at work. Some states with regulations as tight or tighter than ours have higher death rates. Other states with many fewer business restrictions than in North Carolina, and where most schools are open for in-person instruction, have comparable or lower death rates.

Policy choices simply cannot explain all of the variation in COVID incidence and severity, or even most of the variation. Differences in density, urban design, business structure, demographics, and medical care matter a great deal.

My view, stated repeatedly during the COVID crisis, is that North Carolina should have allowed local communities more flexibility in developing public-health measures that best fit their risks and preferences. Gov. Cooper should have consulted the other statewide-elected executives who comprise the Council of State, rather than assuming extraconstitutional and perpetual "emergency" power over private households and businesses. If he felt he needed additional authority to act, he should have approached the General Assembly to secure it, since governors have no more powers in this arena than they are granted by legislation.

Moreover, I believe the governor should have established more-reasonable guidelines for our public schools to reopen for in-person instruction, again in consultation with other elected officials. Many preschools, elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities have been open for in-person instruction for months now across much of the country. While there have been COVID outbreaks here and there, few have led to severe illness.

Schools have not been a major source of deadly infections. Those who predicted otherwise were mistaken, and ought to be willing to shift their views accordingly.

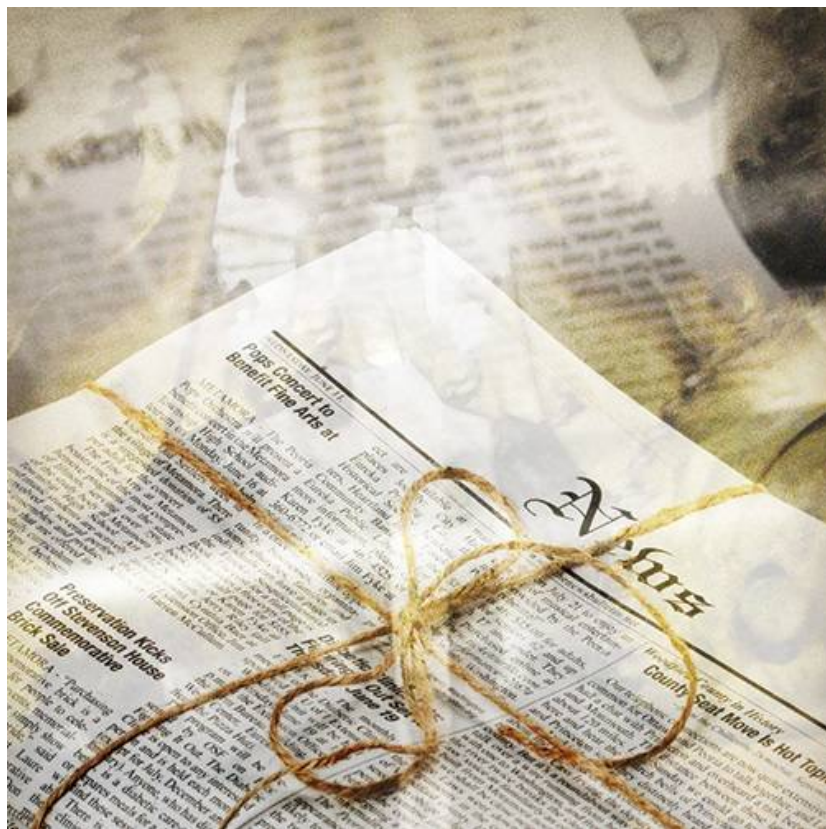
Over the coming months, we should be both determined and prudent. We should all take reasonable precautions, absolutely, but keeping schools, public venues, and large swaths of

our economy closed or severely constrained indefinitely strikes me as the opposite of reasonable. Even when vaccines are available and widely administered, the risk of contracting COVID will not suddenly drop to zero. We must accept the realities of the situation on the ground.

And we must not accept North Carolina's current distinction as first in the South in jobs lost.

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## For 51 years, a Brave old world



October 16, 2020

I am a long-time fan of the Atlanta Braves, and as I prepared to share some selected memories, it occurred to me that the half-century ride has been bumpy, but with a good number of highs.

I was among the first to board the Braves bandwagon, turned onto them by my old Tanglewood community running mate Dave Carroll when I was 12 and didn't know better. Davo made a fundamental flaw in adopting a major-league baseball team, and that was to pick a team that was on the doorstep of extended mediocrity, making the choice when the Dodgers and Yankees were also available.

My inaugural 1969 season was a treat that turned into a tease, with players like Hank Aaron, Phil Niekro, Ralph Garr, Dusty Baker and Darrell Evans leading the Braves to a division title, where they would get swept by the Miracle Mets, who would go on to win the World Series.

What followed was 13 seasons of bad baseball, but I am glad I tagged along, watching the games on WSB-TV, which like the Braves was owned by media mogul Ted Turner. The broadcast crew of Skip Caray, Ernie Johnson and Milo Hamilton was the best in the business.

I cannot forget April 8, 1974, when Hammerin' Hank Aaron hit his 715th home run in Fulton County Stadium off Dodger Al Downing, with a record 53,755 people in the stadium. I watched on a small black-and-white television at my childhood home on Rowland Avenue,



listening to Hamilton declare “there’s a new home run champion of all time, and it’s Henry Aaron.”

I remember where I was on Aug. 1, 1978, when Braves reliever Gene Garber ended Pete Rose’s then-record National League 44-game hitting streak — listening to it on a transistor radio on Franklin Street while zig zagging back to my fraternity house after quenching my thirst at Troll’s.

I remember when Dale Murphy was a rookie in 1976, and Sports Illustrated did a cover story on him, sending me to the dictionary when the magazine labeled him “peripatetic.” Murphy hit with power and had a strong arm, but he was more accurate throwing it from centerfield to home than from home to the pitcher. He settled in centerfield, was the NL MVP in 1982 and 1983 and continues to be snubbed by the Hall of Fame.

I remember the baseball strike in 1981 that forced the cancellation of a third of that season, and telling my mother that my suffering had been diminished by 33 percent.

There was the unfulfilled promise of the 1982 season, which began with 13 straight wins. The Braves lost to the eventual World Series champ St. Louis in the division series, and it would be another nine years before there was postseason play.

I remember returning from Jamaica in 1983 and learning the Braves had traded Brett Butler to the Cleveland Indians for pitcher Len Barker, who had a perfect game on his resume but was now sore armed with a 5.11 ERA. I couldn’t believe the Braves made that trade when I was

otherwise occupied, robbing Atlanta of a young star whose name was plucked from the pages of “Gone with the Wind.”

I remember the 10-minute fight with the San Diego Padres on Aug. 12, 1984, which resulted in the ejection of 17 players. It remains baseball’s poster child for brawls.

I remember where I was at 4 a.m., on July 5, 1985, when Rick Camp, a relief pitcher batting .074, hit perhaps baseball’s most improbable home run with two outs in the bottom of the 18th inning to tie a game at 11-11 against the New York Mets. Camp, exhausted from circling the bases, promptly gave up five runs in the 19th inning and the Braves, true to form, would lose 16-13, ending the eight-hour, 15-minute affair. I was in bed, asleep.

I remember driving home from work on Oct. 14, 1992, and listening through the static on AM radio as Sid Bream lumbered home in the bottom of the ninth inning on a two-out hit by the Braves’ third-string catcher Francisco Cabrera. That capped a 3-2 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates, and sent the Braves to the World Series, where they would lose for the second straight year.

I remember 1993, and the Braves being 9.5 games behind San Francisco in early August but winning 104 games and the division by a single game over the Giants, who lost on the last day of the season to the Dodgers. John Fish, a buddy of mine who was the managing editor of The Robesonian and then held the same title at the Augusta Chronicle, called for help with the headline. “We Love LA” remains the only headline I wrote for a newspaper for which I didn’t work.

I remember 20 division titles, and the World Series disappointments of 1991, 1992, 1996 and 1999.

I remember the at-last moment of the 1995 World Series title, which was delivered by future Hall of Famers Chipper Jones, Greg Maddux, John Smoltz and Tom Glavine. Despite the 26-year wait, there was more relief than joy.

There is too much to unpack, so apologies to skippers Joe Torre and Bobby Cox, the Rocking Man Leo Mazzone, Pascual Perez, who might still be lost on I-285, John Rocker, Pete Van Wieren, Joe Simpson, Chief Noc-A-Homa and many more.

Following the 1999 World Series loss, there were a couple of decades of indifference, during which I rooted for the Braves, but no longer with the same passion. But thanks to COVID-19, which locked me indoors, and politics, which steered me away from watching news, the Braves and I have a second marriage.

The timing is perfect as the Braves are – as this is being written – a single win away from another trip to the World Series, only needing to finish off those dodgy Dodgers.

There is a Dodgers fan who hangs out at Pinecrest Country Club, where I work, having boarded that bus when guys like Koufax and Drysdale were hanging banners. This Pembroke town councilman will remain anonymous because the people of that town might not appreciate that a Lumbee Indian roots for a team from a foreign country, California, instead of the Braves.

So I told Larry Mac before Game 1 that if the Dodgers beat the Braves that I did not want to hear one word out of his mouth. The next day, after the Braves had taken a 1-0 series lead, a despondent Larry walks in.

“Larry,” I said. “Remember when I told you not to say a word to me if the Dodgers beat Atlanta?”

:“Yep,” he said.

“Well, I am not extending the same courtesy,” I said, and then I then let him have it.

I hope I didn't speak too soon. You never know with the Braves.

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## UNC Health is right fit for Southeastern Health, Robeson County and region





October 16, 2020

This week, the Southeastern Health board of trustees announced that we are moving forward with an agreement with UNC Health which will culminate in Southeastern Health becoming the 12th member of the UNC Health system. I want to share more about why we made this decision and why UNC Health, North Carolina's leading public academic health system, is the right fit for our community.

When the board of trustees embarked upon the partnership exploration process last year, we did so to chart the best path forward for our organization. It was a process we undertook seriously, with the community's best interest at heart. During this deliberate process we explored a variety of different options for what the future of health care could look like for our community. Through our discussions with UNC Health, it became clear that our organizations share very similar values and a vision for advancing the quality of care for Southeastern North Carolina.

We found that the leadership of UNC Health truly believe in our mission at Southeastern Health and in the community that we proudly serve. Aligning with UNC Health will enable us to do more to move health care forward in our region than we could ever do on our own. Among the many benefits, closely aligning with UNC Health will provide community residents access to enhanced services and additional specialist and subspecialist physicians in our local community — keeping care close to home.

UNC Health values partnering with smaller hospitals throughout the state of North Carolina. Their impact on improving health and clinical outcomes in rural communities has been profound, earning a national reputation for their work in communities like ours. Additionally, alignment with UNC Health will be invaluable as we work collaboratively to address health disparities such as COPD, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer that exist in our local population. We'll do so with innovative solutions that serve our neighbors in new, creative ways.

While we did not anticipate the many challenges posed by COVID-19, the pandemic has underscored the importance of aligning with the right partner. Under the proposed agreement, we'll benefit from UNC Health's scale and expertise in areas that include

purchasing supplies and equipment, accessing physicians and caregivers who are subject matter experts, and clinical and organizational strategies.

UNC Health is absolutely the right fit for Southeastern Health and for Robeson County. I'm proud of our board for the important work it has done throughout this thoughtful and deliberate process, and I appreciate the support we have received from our community. I'm confident that by aligning with UNC Health, Southeastern will become a stronger regional health-care leader, community partner, and local employer.

Given the various storms our community has faced — whether natural disasters, the current pandemic, or conflicts that are self-created — Southeastern's partnership with UNC Health offers all residents a reason to unite, celebrate, and look toward the future with excitement.

Plans are to finalize the agreement with UNC Health by the end of the year, at which point we will officially become UNC Health Southeastern. We will continue to keep the community informed as we move forward. In the meantime, I invite you to learn more about the agreement and what it will mean for our community by visiting [www.SEHealthForward.org](http://www.SEHealthForward.org).

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## President Trump and Nicholas Sparks' latest book



October 15, 2020

What do President Donald Trump and the lead character of Nicholas Sparks' latest book have in common?

Hint: Walter Reed Medical Center.

Both the president and Trevor Benson, the fictional main character in Sparks' "The Return," received critically important treatment at Walter Reed.

Trump got expert medical care for his coronavirus.

Benson, a Navy surgeon, had his body and mind blown apart in Afghanistan. Serious head injuries, loss of sight in one eye, loss of an ear, damage to his back, and for a surgeon, the career-ending loss of fingers. These injuries plus a heavy dose of post-traumatic stress disorder made Benson a total wreck.

The doctors at Walter Reed and nearby Johns Hopkins put him back together again. Their great psychiatric care moved him to become a psychiatrist himself.

How then is Sparks going to use Benson as the lead in one of his heart-rending romances?

Maybe you remember Sparks' formula for his books that have sold more than 100 million copies. He creates two characters, a man and a woman, brings them together, then something separates them, and somehow they are brought back together, bringing tears to Sparks' readers.

First, Sparks gets Trevor to New Bern. Although Trevor grew up in Washington, D.C., he spent youthful summers with his grandfather who lived happily in his self-built modest house, taking his jerry-rigged boat out for trips on Brice's Creek and tending his hives of honeybees.

When his grandfather dies, Trevor comes back to check on his grandfather's property and decides to stay while he is waiting to begin a residency in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins.

When an attractive female sheriff's deputy named Natalie stops by to check on the grandfather's house, she finds Trevor, and Sparks' magic romance begins.

Trevor is smitten, but Natalie is reserved and inexplicably seems not to want to be seen publicly with him.

He takes her on a boat ride along Brice's Creek where he shows her baby alligators and a nest of bald eaglets. Then he gives her an inside tour of his grandfather's honeybee operation, with a sensitive explanation of how the bees work together in different roles to build their hives and sustain their communities.

Natalie is hooked, Trevor is happy, and the story seems to be over even though we are only half through the book.

Sparks is not through with them. To follow his formula, something has to separate them. So, suddenly, Natalie tells Trevor she has to break away and that their romance is impossible. When she explains why, he understands and sadly moves on. Then Sparks gives him another challenge to solve: Callie, a teenage girl who lives alone in a nearby trailer court had helped Trevor's grandfather with his bees.

Just before he died, the grandfather gave Trevor muddled instructions to help Callie. Callie does not want help, but when it becomes a life-and-death matter, Trevor rushes to help. Without reconstructing their romance, Natalie helps him solve Callie's mystery and save her life.

The story ends.

But Sparks has not followed his formula. He brought Natalie and Trevor together and then set them apart. But he has not reunited them. At the end of the book's last chapter, Trevor is in Baltimore to begin a psychiatric residence at Johns Hopkins. He reads a letter from Natalie. She thanks him for his love, but begs him never to contact her again. Sadly, Sparks does not bring his lovers back together this time.

Wait. The book has an epilogue. Maybe Sparks could complete his formula there, but you will have to read it to find out for sure.



Visit North Carolina, the state's tourism promotion office, should put Sparks on its payroll. His descriptions of the charms of downtown New Bern and the beauty of Brice's Creek made me want to close the book and rush to spend a few days there.

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## COVID shapes debate on worker safety



October 14, 2020

RALEIGH — For 16 years, former state Rep. Cherie Berry has served as North Carolina's labor commissioner. Now she's retiring, and another Republican state representative, Josh Dobson of McDowell County, is running to replace her.

Dobson's opponent is Democrat Jessica Holmes, a member and former chair of the Wake County Board of Commissioners. The two disagree about a range of policy issues. But as I watched their recent televised debate — part of the Hometown Debate series hosted by the North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership and Spectrum News — I was most struck by what they had in common.

It's a stylistic commonality, admittedly. Still, I found it notable in this age of partisan polarization, overheated rhetoric, and insult comedy masquerading as political discourse.

"Ensuring safe and healthy working environments is not a partisan issue," said Holmes, who practices labor and employment law in Raleigh. She argued that employees and employers have a "mutual interest" in promoting safe workplaces and should be "at the table making decisions together to ensure the safety and health of all of our workers."

Dobson made a similar point. "I think now more than ever we need leaders who will bring people together and focus more on solving problems that North Carolinians face and less on ideology," he said, referring to his own eight-year record in the General Assembly of recruiting Republican and Democratic sponsors for the bills he filed.

Before becoming a legislator, Dobson was a county commissioner in his home county of McDowell.

“Governing is an art,” he explained. “You have to listen to both sides and you have to be more like an umpire. You have to be fair. That’s the approach I’ll take.”

Of course, the two candidates for labor commissioner have contrasting ideologies that clashed repeatedly during the debate. The Democrat, Holmes, talked up Medicaid expansion and advocated a large increase in North Carolina’s minimum wage. The Republican, Dobson, championed the state legislature’s efforts to boost job creation through regulatory relief and warned that a higher minimum wage would displace some low-skilled workers from their jobs.

Nevertheless, the debate was civil and substantive. I think both campaigns recognize that many North Carolina voters are exhausted by smashmouth politics. While policy disagreements need airing, they need not be converted into weapons of mass political destruction.

The other theme of the Holmes-Dobson debate was unsurprising: the central role that COVID-19 is playing in the 2020 elections.

Moderator Loretta Boniti, from Spectrum News, asked several questions about North Carolina’s pandemic response, focusing on such matters as safety rules for meat-processing plants and protective equipment for health-care workers.

Again, both Dobson and Holmes stressed that the state had to find a balance between reopening businesses quickly and reopening them safely. Holmes defended Gov. Roy Cooper’s go-slow approach in large measure while Dobson argued that certain regulations the governor had proposed — such as maintaining six feet of separation while workers were harvesting crops or traveling to and from job sites — were “unrealistic” and unlikely to be enforceable.

“It is not OK for us to decide that CDC guidelines aren’t worthwhile, or [are] inconvenient,” Holmes insisted. “If CDC guidelines say workers need to be six feet apart, they need to be six feet apart.”

Dobson argued that the state labor commissioner should examine each proposed rule carefully, weighing the costs and benefits. He said he supported some of Cooper’s proposals when they reflected “common sense,” regulations such as requiring workers to wear masks indoors or within six feet of another person.

As long as North Carolinians elect their state labor commissioner — and they have shown little interest in giving up their role in selecting Council of State members — candidates will struggle to get noticed in the midst of higher-profile contests for president, governor, and U.S. Senate.

Judging from their recent debate, Josh Dobson and Jessica Holmes have chosen to elevate their discussion above the usual muck to focus on their philosophical disagreements about salient issues. Good for them.

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## Do away with debates



October 13, 2020

Presidential debates are outdated. They've outlived their sell-by date. They should be consigned to the dustbin of history.

COVID-19 killed off this week's scheduled presidential debate. Common sense says cancel them for all time. Sixty years after the Kennedy-Nixon debates, they no longer serve any useful purpose. In fact, debates are downright dangerous to democracy.

They hit bottom when the highlight of the vice-presidential debate was the fly on Mike Pence's hair.

In that first encounter of the 2024 cycle, Kamala Harris proved herself a formidable debater. Both she and Pence dodged questions. Pence was effective attacking Joe Biden and defending President Trump. But if the Trump-Pence ticket is losing women voters, why did Pence constantly interrupt and talk over the two women on stage?

Even the fly stopped after two minutes.

President Trump's insults and interruptions made the first presidential debate painful to watch. His performance may have been as harmful to his political health as the virus was to his physical health. Polls showed him falling as far as 14 points behind Biden.

One report said Chris Christie (who was hospitalized for COVID) urged Trump to interrupt Biden; that apparently causes people who stutter to lose their train of thought.

Trump did throw Biden off stride. He threw moderator Chris Wallace off stride. And he may have turned off swing voters, especially those who like his policies but have concerns about his temperament.

Trump believes you win debates by dominating your opponents.

He might have done better with the opposite strategy: Let Biden talk. In 1988 and 2008, Biden's runaway tongue derailed his presidential hopes. Many Democrats worried after the debate that Biden sometimes floundered when he had opportunities to articulate a clear



and compelling message about what he would do as president. Trump's interruptions actually obscured Biden's stumbles.

Biden looked strong when he stood up to Trump. He scored when he looked into the camera and directly addressed Americans — about the pandemic and, especially, about his son Hunter's battle with addiction. But at other times he showed the same weaknesses he had in the Democratic primary debates.

Because President Trump and many of his staffers were infected with COVID, the Commission on Presidential Debates wanted the candidates to be in separate studios this week. There's precedent for that. In the third 1960 debate, Kennedy was in New York, Nixon was in Los Angeles and the moderator was in Chicago. Separate studios might make it easier to cut away from — or just cut off — a candidate who talks too much.

But, with this week's face-off canceled, let's ask ourselves: What do debates have to do with being president?

What's the benefit of thrusting candidates into gladiator-like, high-stakes, high-anxiety, do-or-die duels under the white-hot spotlight of national TV? Does their ability or inability to excel on that stage tell us anything about their ability to serve in public office?

Yes, we want to see candidates in a setting that forces them to be real. Television ads, photo ops and scripted speeches don't do that. But we learn as much, if not more, by watching candidates answer real-time questions from real-life people in town-hall formats.

Today's debates are about theater, acting and performing on stage. They are reality TV. If we want a president who projects calm, confidence and command authority on TV, let's give Lester Holt the job and be done with it.

Debates reward good looks, a glib tongue and a quick mind. Being president requires good judgment, sound character and thoughtful deliberation. They're not the same qualities.

We need presidents, not performers. We don't need debates.

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## Ticket-splitting still shapes elections



October 12, 2020

RALEIGH — North Carolina, like most of the country, has become increasingly polarized in our political thinking and behavior. But what does that really mean?

Well, we know it doesn't mean that all North Carolinians are so rigidly partisan they support only candidates of one major party or the other. Split-ticket voters do make up a smaller share of the electorate than they did generations ago. They're rarer. That doesn't make them extinct.

Consider the 2016 election cycle. Donald Trump won North Carolina with 49.8% of votes cast for president. At the same time, Democrat Roy Cooper won the governorship narrowly with 49% to Republican incumbent Pat McCrory's 48.8% — even as Democrat Josh Stein was elected as attorney general with 50.3%, Republican Richard Burr as U.S. senator with 51.1%, Republican Dan Forest as lieutenant governor with 51.8%, Democrat Elaine Marshall as secretary of state with 52.2%, and Republican Steve Troxler as agriculture commissioner with 55.6%.

It's true that not every North Carolinian who voted actually marked a preference in all these races. Most did, though. There were Trump/Burr/Forest voters who picked Cooper over McCrory — enough to tip the race. There were Hillary Clinton supporters who also picked Troxler, padding his margin of victory.

In a more polarized atmosphere, Democratic and Republican campaigns do tend to focus more on turning out their base than trying to persuade undecideds, as the latter group is small and often disconnected from news consumption and the political process. However, North Carolina's electorate is both polarized and closely divided. Just a percentage point or two of split-ticket voters can be the difference between winning and losing.

Moreover, while there is some debate about this among political scientists, I think the best-available evidence tells us that some of those split-ticket voters are also strategic voters.

That is, they aren't very ideological. After all, if they were, they'd probably be reliable Democrats or Republicans. Instead, these swayable voters are interested more in leadership qualities and judge political candidates in context. And they aren't crazy about either major party controlling all the levers of government.

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis made a clear pitch for this small but potentially decisive group of North Carolinians in a recent Politico interview. While stressing that he continues to believe Trump can and should be re-elected, he argued that even voters inclined to choose Joe Biden should consider voting for Tillis at the same time.

“The best check on a Biden presidency is for Republicans to have a majority in the Senate,” Tillis said. “And I do think ‘checks and balances’ does resonate with North Carolina voters.”

Cal Cunningham, for his part, has tried to distinguish himself a bit from the rest of the Democratic ticket, emphasizing his background and keeping the focus on Tillis’s record rather than trying to defend Biden’s. (Now the rest of the Democratic ticket is trying desperately to distinguish themselves from Cunningham, for a different and obvious reason.)

There’s a similar dynamic at play in the state treasurer race between Republican incumbent Dale Folwell and Democrat Ronnie Chatterji. Endorsed by the State Employees Association of North Carolina, Folwell is actively cultivating crossover voters who may favor Democrats in other races but appreciate his efforts to reduce costs in the pension system and health plan for teachers and state employees.

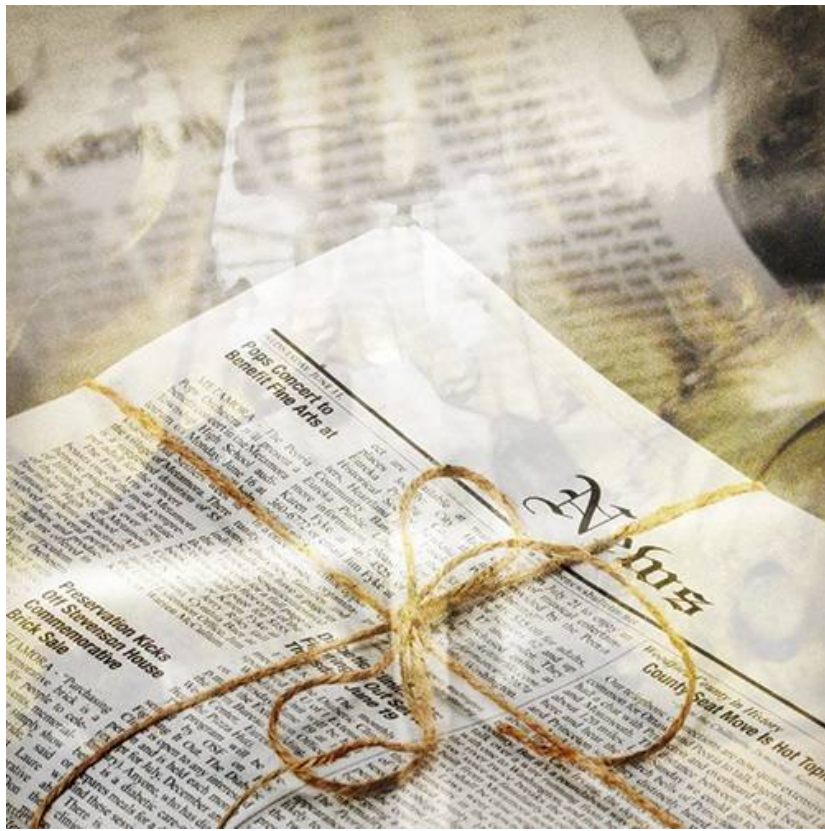
Polarization has pros and cons. You might see it as “truth in advertising.” With nearly all conservatives identified as Republicans and nearly all progressives as Democrats, it makes it easier for ideologically minded voters to cast their ballots intentionally, particularly in down-ballot races where voters know little about candidates other than their party affiliation.

On the other hand, polarization can make it harder for legislative bodies to produce coherent policies that won’t be vetoed by executives, be they presidents or governors. Neither Washington nor Raleigh has produced regular government budgets for years, as an example.

Whatever you think of it, however, polarization hasn’t yet hunted split-ticket voters to extinction. They still matter — and candidates know it.

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## Four years later: Recalling Matthew





It seems like much longer, but it was four years ago today that this refugee from Hurricane Matthew awakened dazed and confused on a Monday in a Charlotte hotel with a singular thought: How was I going to perform my duties as editor of The Robesonian newspaper and provide need-to-know information for this county's residents in the wake of that storm given that our office on Roberts Avenue was swamped, our printing press damaged and my staff scattered?

I had made the decision to head westward early on Sunday, the day after Matthew dumped about 17 inches of rain in a half day. I don't need to remind you of the flooding and devastation that followed. You lived it.

I took flight after I spoke with an elderly couple stranded in their vehicle in my subdivision told me they were out of gasoline and Interstate 95 was closed. I went looking for gasoline for them, and was told by a highway patrolman as I approached I-95 that the nearest place to get gasoline was Rockingham.

I went home, saw that I had half a tank, packed enough stuff for a few days, and got on U.S. 74 with plans to camp in Rockingham, but decided to keep on going until I reached Charlotte. That night, using Facebook, my personal page and the newspaper's, as well as robesonian.com, I told readers of our plight and we would do the best we could. "Tell us what you need to know," I told them.

The effort was noticed by Rachel Maddow of MSNBC, who tweeted: "God bless The Robesonian in NC — paper's offices flooded catastrophically but these heroes are still publishing." I remember appreciating the sentiment, but cringing at the characterization of "heroes." I was in a Charlotte hotel, dry and comfortable, a continental breakfast awaiting, a warm shower enjoyed, with all the amenities. I was concerned about what I had left behind, and how I could help.

I was in an elevator with three other people when I received a text: A friend of mine's father-and-law had died in the aftermath of the storm, and it was then that I first realized the extent of the tragedy I had fled physically — and that few outside of Robeson County even realized.

So we hatched a plan, which worked as a template during Hurricane Florence: Most of my staff members were not in a position to help, dealing with their own circumstances, but reporters Sarah Willets and Mike Gellaty, may he rest in peace, answered my call. We would focus on need-to-know information, how to find food, water, clothing and shelter, areas to avoid because of flooding, roads that were closed and those that were accessible, updates on efforts to restore power and water, anything that we believed would help Robesonians through their individual challenges.

And thus began a series of 15-hour days. We would begin about 6 a.m. and work until about 9 p.m., populating Facebook and robesonian.com with whatever information Sarah and Mike could gather on the ground, and what I could get by telephone. That week, I received and accepted more than 300 friendship requests, both from Robeson County residents and folks across the country who had an interest in what was happening here. I remember waking up one morning and seeing I had more than 40 messages on Facebook, from people who were all seeking information, many asking how they could help. I began systematically working through them, plagued by the fact that my good computer was underwater at our office, and I was operating with one that taunted me relentlessly with a spinning cursor.

It was on Wednesday that I began to worry about Sarah, whose internal battery was running low, and telling her that she needed to take care of herself, and that a friend of mine had rigged a shower and she could go there to freshen up. He was two miles away. She said this: "Donnie, you don't understand. Because of closed roads, if I could get there, it would probably take about two hours."

That was my fourth oh-crap Matthew moment: The first came when I was told on Saturday afternoon that our office was flooding, the second coming Saturday night when a firefighter friend called and told me his department in St. Pauls had rescued more than 40 people from their homes, and the third being my encounter with that elderly couple trying to find a way back to their High Point home.

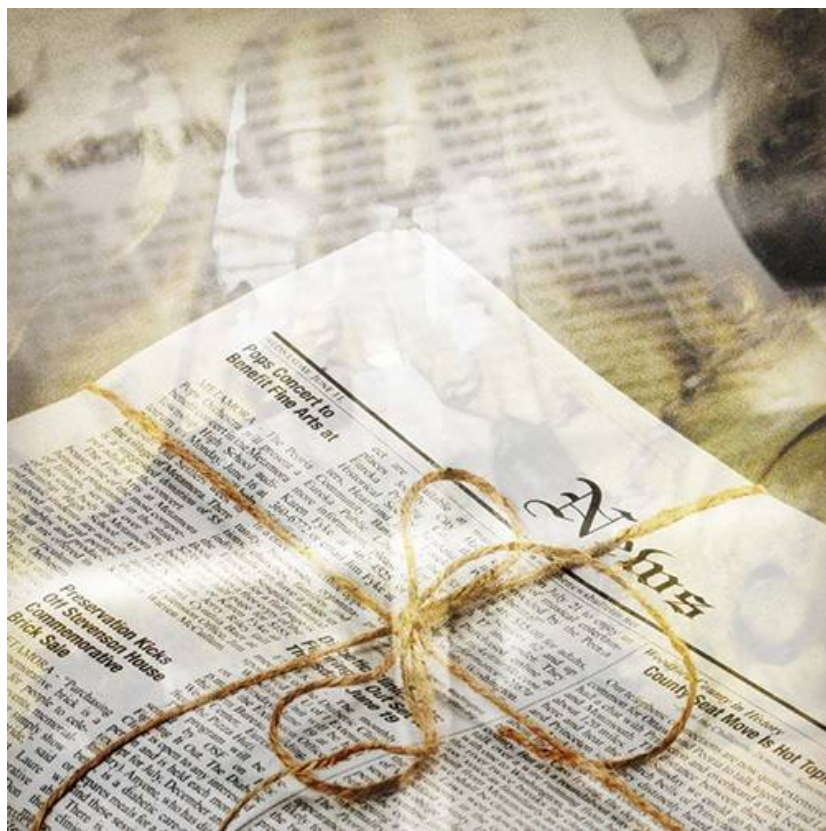
I recall this today not for another round of applause, but if you insist, give it to Sarah and Mike. It is not false modesty to declare that they did the hard work under incredibly difficult circumstances, while I worked hard, but was comfortable as I did so. I got through each day knowing that when the clock hit 9 p.m. I could walk a few hundred yards, grab me a good meal, and have a Bud Lite.

I have instead used this anniversary of Matthew to remind readers of the critical role community newspapers play and to point out that they are being gutted and shuttered as more and more people look elsewhere, including to social media, for their news. I worry about the rising number of communities who will face similar tragedies but will not be able to look to their local newspaper to light the path to higher ground.

If you are not concerned by that possibility, you should be.

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## Voters likely unmoved by competing Cunningham-Tillis personal revelations



October 08, 2020

It's hard to believe today, but when Ronald Reagan ran for president in 1980, it was considered a possibly significant liability that he would become, at the time, the first divorced person to assume the nation's highest office.

Reagan clearly wasn't the first president to have experienced something other than a completely happy and monogamous marriage throughout his adulthood. But the notion

that his marital problems were publicly known — and not just the province of a nodding and winking D.C. press corps — was thought to be politically damaging.

Of course, in the end, Reagan's very human background turned out to be a non-issue.

And today, in the aftermath of the presidency of Bill Clinton, and especially in the era of Donald Trump — a man who has been repeatedly and persuasively accused of sexual assault and publicly admitted to have engaged in countless trysts throughout the course of three stormy marriages — the idea that voters find relevant a candidate's marital or relationship woes has almost certainly been laid permanently to rest. That said, the never-ending searches for internet "clicks" and last-minute votes continues to drive news outlets and rival campaigns to promote salacious headlines and references to "steamy" affairs and checkered martial backgrounds whenever possible.

Here in North Carolina, we've been witness to this phenomenon in recent days as opponents of the Republican and Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate have traded revelations and allegations regarding their opponents' personal and marital improprieties.

First came word of Democratic nominee Cal Cunningham's troubled marriage, including text messages showing that he might have had an extramarital romantic entanglement.

Soon thereafter arrived the news that the first of Republican incumbent Thom Tillis's three marriages included allegations by his first spouse (to whom he was married twice) that he had committed "cruel and inhuman treatment" and that she had felt "unsafe and improper" in remaining married to him.

Should these matters be relevant to the campaign?

Well, obviously, that's up to North Carolina voters to decide, but the suspicion here is that the response will likely be a near unanimous yawn.

After all, if someone with Donald Trump's record of personal behavior can win the overwhelming support of the nation's Christian conservative movement, as he did in 2016, it's hard to see how the revelations regarding Cunningham and Tillis could motivate voters to switch sides in a campaign in which the candidates differ so sharply on issues of massive importance to the future of the nation.

When it came to Trump, Christian right voters pragmatically decided that his positions on abortion, LGBTQ equality and separation of church and state were vastly more important than his personal past as a playboy casino owner who made hush money payments to a porn star.

And so seems likely will be the case in the Cunningham-Tillis race.

For ideological conservatives, the notion that they would abandon Tillis's pledge to seat more ultra-conservative nominees on the Supreme Court — based on his complicated marital record that featured some disturbing allegations — strains credulity.

Similarly, for progressives, the notion that they would abandon Cunningham and thereby significantly increase the likelihood that millions of Americans would lose their health insurance and abet policies that ignore the global environmental crisis simply because Cunningham has marital problems, is equally hard to imagine.

Polling conducted over the weekend in light of the Cunningham revelation, but prior to the news about Tillis, seemed to confirm this assessment.

None of this is to say that many North Carolinians of all political persuasions aren't frustrated or even angered by the revelations. When it comes to their politicians, most Americans still yearn for squeaky clean individuals like Barack Obama and Jimmy Carter —



even as they also demand savvy and ruthless “dealmakers” who know both “where all the bodies are buried” and how to grease the political wheels like Lyndon Johnson, Reagan and Clinton.

When it comes, however to the massive battle of ideas in which the nation currently finds itself immersed and, in particular, the giant stakes in the 2020 election, it’s clear that Americans have become an extremely practical and hardheaded group. Much as they might wish it were otherwise, they understand that choices in politics can be crystal clear, even when they must be made between decidedly imperfect options.



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